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ABSTRACT

Intended as an appraisal of A. J. Liebling's performance as a critic of the press, this study examines Liebling's career and analyzes his criticism for both quantity and quality. Following a brief biography, contents include "The Wayward Press"--also the title of his column published in "The New Yorker" from 1935 to 1963--which describes Liebling's working methods and reading habits; "The Substance," which provides a condensed version of his ideas as expressed in published writings and speech manuscripts; and "An Evaluation," which assesses Liebling's place in the history of press criticism and discusses his pioneering efforts at improving New York's newspapers. An annotated bibliography of A. J. Liebling's principal works on the press is appended. (RB)

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EDMUND M. MIDURA

## *A. J. Liebling: The Wayward Pressman as Critic*

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# EDMUND M. MIDURA

# *A. J. Liebling: The Wayward Pressman as Critic*

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# Introduction

IT HAS BEEN said of the American press that it is the least-criticized institution in our society, although it considers itself a critic of all other institutions. As Louis M. Lyons put it in 1964:

> No other institution more requires constant and searching criticism, regardless of the hypersensitivity to criticism so often evidenced by too many of its proprietors. . . . The lack of any sustained criticism of so essential an institution as the press is a serious lapse in responsible relationships in a rational society. This is one of the yet unanswered problems of a democratic society.[1]

The American press has generally been hostile to and resentful of outside criticism. Yet, despite this opposition, our supposedly least-criticized institution has certainly not gone *un*criticized. Vigorous intramural criticism often appeared in American newspapers before power gradually shifted from the editorial office to the business office in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries; hundreds of articles appraising and criticizing press performance have appeared in general and specialized magazines; many individuals—among them Upton Sinclair, Will Irwin, Silas Bent, Oswald Garrison Villard, Morris Markey, Robert Benchley, George Seldes, A. J. Liebling, Carl Lindstrom, Don Hollenbeck, Charles Collingwood, Nat Hentoff, Harry Ashmore and Ben Bagdikian—have written articles and books and broadcast programs about the press. Other evaluations of press performance have come from journalism schools, individual academicians and various other persons, agencies and organizations inside and outside the craft.

What has been lacking is systematic and sustained appraisal and criticism focusing on press performance as a process. Sim-

[1] "Liebling, Libel and the Press," *The Atlantic*, 213:5 (May 1964), p. 46.

ilarly, the process of appraisal and criticism itself and the major critics themselves have been subjected to little formal study.

The department in *The New Yorker* known as "The Wayward Press" has been one of the most sustained—although irregular and uneven—series of magazine articles on press performance, stretching from the magazine's founding in 1925 to the death of A. J. Liebling in 1963. Through his "Wayward Press" articles, and the subsequent republication of many of them in three books, Liebling became the leading press critic of his day (and at the same time a wit and satirist of the first magnitude). A figure reputed to have frayed the tempers of many newspaper executives (Bagdikian has humorously suggested that a new unit of measurement, the Liebling, be used to gauge the blood pressure of angry newspaper proprietors[2]), Liebling turned out 83 "Wayward Presses" between 1945 and 1963. Although he is often cited and assigned for reading in journalism classes and quoted in speeches, articles and books, Liebling himself has been little studied. Appraisals of *his* performance as a critic of the press are rare in the literature of journalism. This study has undertaken to help fill that void.

The method is set forth in detail in the dissertation.[3] Basically it asked what Liebling did and how well he did it.

[2] "The Press and Its Critics: Please Don't Shoot the Piano Player," in *Problems of Journalism—1964: Proceedings of the 1964 Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*. Washington: ASNE, 1964, p. 104.

[3] Midura, Edmund M., "An Appraisal of A. J. Liebling's Performance as a Critic of the Press," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, February 1969.

# A Brief Biography

Abbott Joseph Liebling was born in New York in 1904 to a prosperous, cultured family. Literature and music were available in his boyhood home, and the family occasionally traveled to Europe. Liebling's father was a furrier who lost his fortune in the Crash of 1929, but this was after his son had left home for a newspaper career.

The availability of newspapers at home—several different New York papers, in fact—was an early factor in interesting Liebling in the press. Another was the boy's nearsightedness, which cut down his outdoor activities and led him to spend many hours indoors reading.

Liebling's youth was relatively uneventful until he entered Dartmouth College in 1920 and encountered John Moffatt Mecklin, a professor of sociology who had recently come to Dartmouth from Pittsburgh. Liebling formed no friendship or even personal acquaintance with Mecklin, but he was impressed by the man's lectures on the great steel strike of 1919. First, Liebling later wrote, Mecklin fostered a critical attitude within him by discoursing on the untrustworthiness of newspaper reporting of the strike and on newspaper bias against labor. Second, Mecklin praised the New York *World* for telling the truth about the strike. "After I heard him," Liebling wrote, "there was only one paper in the country I would have considered working on. That was the *World*."[1]

Liebling apparently decided at some time during his stay at Dartmouth that he wanted to be a writer and a journalist, yet the one course that he failed there was English composition. In the end he did not receive a degree from Dartmouth, being expelled in his senior year for repeatedly missing the compulsory morning chapel. (Liebling was born into a Jewish family, but

[1] A. J. Liebling, *The Wayward Pressman* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1947), p. 23.

he was an agnostic as an adult.) Dartmouth nevertheless has recognized him as Dartmouth '24 in its alumni magazine.

After leaving Hanover he was briefly with a New Hampshire magazine called *Granite Monthly* but he soon returned to New York and entered the Pulitzer School of Journalism at Columbia University. His work there from the police reporters' "shacks" solidified his desire to be a newspaperman. Other aspects of Columbia bothered him:

> Although the school bore the name of a fighting editor-publisher, there was nothing in the instruction to suggest that a newspaper ought to take a definite position in any controversy. The pattern held up to us was Adolph Ochs's colorless, odorless, and especially tasteless *Times* of 1923, a political hermaphrodite capable of intercourse with conservatives of both parties at the same time. We were constantly assured that all publishers were righteous. . . . We were enjoined to be sober and industrious, because the day of the drinking newspaperman was past. And we were given paragraphs from newspapers to recompose, as an exercise in "newswriting." It had all the intellectual status of a training school for future employees of the A. & P.[2]

Liebling began to develop a disquiet about the newspaper field and he formed a negative attitude about journalism education. But he persevered and in 1925 gained a Bachelor of Literature degree—"a maraschino cherry on the sundae of academic absurdity."[3]

Six weeks of desultory job-hunting added to his disquiet with the knowledge that New York editors were less interested in the fact that he was a New Yorker keen to work in the city he knew than in whether he had ever worked in small cities distant from New York. This attitude seemed to Liebling to be the exact opposite of what it should be.

But in 1925 he found a job on the sports copy desk of the *Times*. However, he was fired within eight months for having inserted a fictitious referee's name—"Ignoto," Latin and Italian for unknown—in basketball box scores whenever the correspondent had not supplied a referee's name.

The year 1926 found him briefly doing general reporting for

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[3] *Ibid.*, 43.

the Providence *Evening Bulletin*, but he was quickly moved up to feature writing for its sister paper, the morning Providence *Journal*. He stayed with the Providence papers until 1930, except for an important year in Paris in 1926-27, when his father provided the money for him to study at the Sorbonne. He was an indifferent student of French medieval history and literature, but it was here that two of his greatest passions ripened—France and the love of the good life, especially eating. On returning to the *Journal* in 1927 "I . . . oozed prose over every aspect of Rhode Island life."[4]

Although he enjoyed Rhode Island, by 1930 Liebling began to itch for New York again. Whether he quit the *Journal* or was fired is unclear. His writings on this are contradictory; his friends interviewed for this study are not sure. Nevertheless, he was back in New York in the fall of 1930 unsuccessfully trying to join the *World* staff. He did finally catch on as a feature stringer for the *Sunday World*. The sale of the morning, evening and Sunday *World*s by the Pulitzer heirs in February 1931 ended his dream of writing for that newspaper. In fact, the sale of the *World*s to Scripps-Howard was a watershed in Liebling's life—he came back to it again and again during his later writing career. His resentment of what the Pulitzer heirs and Roy W. Howard had done knew no bounds. The abandonment of the traditions of the *World*, its combination with the *Telegram*—which Liebling considered to be a vastly inferior paper, the hopelessness of the employees' attempt to buy the *World*, the summary unemployment of almost 3,000 *World* workers, and the way in which even some of the *Telegram* staffers were summarily cast adrift to make room for desirable ex-*World* people all made deep impressions on Liebling and no doubt profoundly influenced his later attitudes as a critic of the press.

Back on the streets himself, Liebling tried all the other New York papers before he could bring himself to try the new *World-Telegram*. But he finally did, perhaps in the hope that Howard would live up to his promise to continue the spirit of the *World*. "I felt a personal resentment," Liebling later wrote, "against this newsprint Falstaff capering over the dead Hotspur."[5]

[4] *Ibid.*, 60.
[5] *Ibid.*, 102.

In four years at the *World-Telegram* Liebling wrote almost a thousand feature stories. He started there at $75 a week, but as the Depression deepened his pay was cut twice, dropping him to $60.75 a week, less than he had been earning in Providence almost five years before. Although he liked his work, it was nevertheless galling to have to work for Howard, the co-villain in the death of the *World*, the archetype of the "rube" and the moneyed interests. He wrote:

> Very early in my *World-Telegram* life I acquired a human responsibility, which through circumstances beyond the control of either of us became at times exceedingly heavy. This took the carefree, juvenile jollity out of journalism for me definitively. It taught me that society is divided, not into newspaper people and non-newspaper people, but into people with money and people without it. I did not belong to a joyous, improvident professional group including me and Roy Howard, but to a section of society including me and any floorwalker at Macy's. Mr. Howard, even though he asked to be called Roy, belonged in a section that included him and the gent who owned Macy's. This clarified my thinking about publishers, their common interests and motivations.[6]

Nineteen thirty-four was a busy year. Liebling was married—the first of three childless marriages. He was involved in work [illegible] the fledgling Newspaper Guild. He started work on the first [illegible] his 17 books. He began to report and rewrite for *The New Yorker*. His contributions appeared in the "Talk of the Town" department.

In 1935 Liebling asked for his first raise from the *World-Telegram*, was refused, and quit. He then completed the list of major newspaper publishing figures for whom he worked with an eight-week stint with Hearst's King Features Syndicate. He soon, however, negotiated a staff position on *The New Yorker*. His first year there was not smooth, but after he made the transition from the newspaper short-feature style to the longer magazine story format he became established as a writer of "profiles." Liebling never established a close relationship with Harold Ross, the founder and editor of *The New Yorker*, but he did respect and admire him.

[6] *Ibid.*, 103-4.

During World War II Liebling was stunned by the fall of France. He made four trips to Europe and North Africa and established a reputation as a good war correspondent. After he took over "The Wayward Press" in 1945, Liebling enjoyed the assumed role of press critic, although he never really devoted full time to it. Most of these pieces were published between 1945 and 1953 and during a period in the 1960s. During 1945-63 Liebling also traveled widely while writing on eating, boxing, horse racing, the Olympics, Middle East politics, Chicago and, among other characters, Governor Earl Long of Louisiana. But by the late 1950s he was not a well man.

Liebling was distressed and depressed in November 1963 by the assassination of President Kennedy. On December 19, 1963, he entered Mount Sinai hospital in New York with bronchial pneumonia. He died on December 28, having returned to his beloved Paris in his last delirium. His wife and a sister survived.

Liebling was remembered by his friends and acquaintances as "Joe," a shy, quiet, amiable, kind man. He loved to tell stories, but he might keep silent through an entire meal with friends. He was as prodigious an eater as he was a voracious reader. He is still fondly remembered in New York. "The circle of his admirers is almost a cult," one former acquaintance told this writer.

# "The Wayward Press"

PRECURSORS of the "Wayward Press" department in *The New Yorker* appeared under various names from 1925 to 1927—"Behind the News," "The Current Press," "A Reporter at Large" (which continued with a completely different focus) and "The Press in Review"—before "The Wayward Press" appeared atop the column in the issue of December 24, 1927. Morris Markey, formerly a reporter for the New York *World*, had written most of these pieces before Robert Benchley took over in mid-1927 under the pseudonym "Guy Fawkes." Benchley wrote 74 "Wayward Presses," most of them light, chatty and more or less superficial, before his last appeared in 1939. Thereafter the feature was almost moribund until A. J. Liebling, bursting with things to get off his chest after war correspondence in Europe and North Africa, took it over in 1945.

Liebling described his decision to try "The Wayward Press" in his first book on the press:

> It was only in 1945, when I was settling down again in this country that I began to read newspapers regularly again. I read foreign news with constant, involuntary reference to what I had seen in Europe and to my knowledge of the men filing the despatches. I read domestic news in the light of what I had learned between Professor Mecklin's speech [on industry's avarice and its riding roughshod over the little man] and the Hearst executive's dictum about the three things people really cared about [blood, money, sex]. Then I began to read sporting news again, because I liked boxing and horse racing a lot, and while I was on the page I looked at other sports stories, too. I read editorials because they made me sore, and columnists because they usually made me feel terribly clever. I read book reviews habitually, and quite often dramatic and musical criticism, although my interest in the theater and music was desultory. Then I read a lot of the other stuff, even though I had already looked at everything that ordinarily had any interest for me, because newspaper reading can become a nervous habit, like wife-beating or small talk. After a few months at home

I began to react to some of the things I read. Some of my reactions resembled severe attacks of mental hives or prickly heat. Occasionally they verged on what psychiatrists call the disturbed and assaultative. So I suggested to Bill Shawn, the managing editor of *The New Yorker,* who relayed to Harold Ross, the head man, that we revive "The Wayward Press" department.[1]

Ross agreed. Liebling's first "Wayward Press" chided the Associated Press for its treatment of the correspondent who gave it the scoop on the German surrender. Eighty-two more "Wayward Presses" flowed from his typewriter.

Liebling's press fare during this period included daily reading of all the New York papers including, after a while, the *Wall Street Journal, Journal of Commerce,* and *Il Progresso Italo-Americano.* During the periodic New York newspaper strikes he picked up whatever other foreign-language New York papers he could read, but was generally dissatisfied with the out-of-town papers.

He usually read the Washington and Chicago newspapers and a sampling of Southern newspapers. Among others, he subscribed to the Las Vegas *Sun* and read it when he could find the time or when he found his regular reading boring. He also counted among his regular favorites *The Times* and *The Observer* of London. Of course, when he was working on an article, he would read other papers as part of his research.

He traveled widely during this period and wherever he went he devoured the local newspapers. Consequently there followed "Wayward Presses" and other pieces in which he dissected the newspapers of the Caribbean, England, Scotland, Norway, France, New Orleans, Chicago and Nevada. Liebling, who lived in Manhattan and Easthampton, Long Island, has been accused of parochialism, but he did read out-of-town newspapers whenever he got his hands on them. The difference is that he read the New York papers almost systematically when he was there and saw only a few out-of-town papers. But when he was outside of New York or working on a particular article, Liebling paid careful attention to the newspapers he encountered. His office was always stacked high with used newsprint.

[1] *The Wayward Pressman,* pp. 116-17.

In addition to his first-hand use of nonlocal papers, Liebling was also the beneficiary of the work of many people who admired what he was doing and who kept him supplied with examples of the foibles of their local newspapers. There are many references to this material in Liebling's writings and he received much such mail. Unfortunately, he saved little of it, and whatever might be in the files of *The New Yorker* was not made available to this writer. His widow, author Jean Stafford (Liebling's third wife), recalled that after the Kennedy assassination Liebling received many letters asking him to find out the truth about what happened in Dallas.[2] (He was, at his death, working on a "Wayward Press" study of coverage of the assassination. Both his widow and Shawn have expressed the belief that it had not progressed beyond note-taking,[3] and this writer found no such manuscript in his files.)

Liebling also received many letters of support and encouragement from working journalists, yet he was not attempting to be a national institution: "I have never made any attempt to cover the whole press of the nation . . . ," he wrote. "It would take a staff of 30 or 40 people just to read papers every day, and the results might or might not make fascinating publication—I am inclined to think not."[4]

Liebling's methods were not typical of formal research. Shawn has said of Liebling's method of press criticism:

> He [Liebling] regularly read the New York papers. He got an idea from something that he read and then he set about methodically reading all that he could find on that topic. He did not usually start his newspaper reading looking for something in particular.
>
> He did his own clipping; he had no assistant or helper. [Liebling has mentioned using helpers for some menial tasks, and Mrs. Liebling, who herself was on *The New Yorker,* has expressed the belief that these persons might have been from a pool of editorial helpers.]
>
> Occasionally he would ask for subscriptions to out-of-town papers, and there would be great piles of papers in his office.

[2] Jean Stafford, *A Mother in History* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965, p. 39.

[3] Interviews with Jean Stafford Liebling, March 30-31, 1968, and with William Shawn, May 17, 1968.

[4] A. J. Liebling, *The Press* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), p. 140.

The ideas for the pieces were generally his, although we might have occasionally made some suggestions for a piece to him. There were no set number of "Wayward Presses" to be done. He did them when he felt like it. I don't believe that there were any that we didn't use, although there might possibly have been one or two. [This writer found no unpublished "Wayward Presses" among Liebling's manuscripts.][5]

Shawn's description generally follows those of Mrs. Liebling and of Samuel B. McDowell, a friend and occasional collaborator who shared Liebling's interest in press criticism.[6] His own writings reveal no explicit exposition of Liebling's critical method.

Liebling said more than once that he enjoyed the role of critic of the press, but he did not keep up his high pitch of activity after the first few years of "The Wayward Press." Most of the pieces were published between 1945 and 1953. There was a long fallow period thereafter and another burst of activity in the 1960s.[7] Shawn recalled that Liebling "at least twice told me that he had said everything that he could say."[8] Still, Liebling usually found something to say again and came back to writing an occasional "Wayward Press," although his later pieces were less concerned with the handling of individual stories and more concerned with larger trends.

Three other factors should be mentioned: In the 1950s he devoted much time to boxing, horse racing and covering the Olympics; he traveled extensively in the 1950s, sometimes staying overseas for months; his health was beginning to fail. There must also have been a certain amount of discouragement in trying to crack what Liebling felt to be the smug facade of the press. "(The) longer I criticized the press," he wrote in 1956, "the more it disimproved. . . ."[9] Despite this element of discouragement,

[5] Interview, May 17, 1968.

[6] Interviews, March 30-31, 1968, May 17, 1968.

[7] By years, the number of Liebling's "Wayward Presses" published were: 1945, 2; 1946, 11; 1947, 12; 1948, 10; 1949, 7; 1950, 10; 1951, 3; 1952, 4; 1953, 8; 1954, 1; 1955, 2; 1956, 1; 1957, 0; 1958, 0; 1959, 0; 1960, 5, 1961, 3; 1962, 0; 1963, 4.

[8] Interview, May 17, 1968.

[9] A. J. Liebling, *The Sweet Science* (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), p. 6.

friends and colleagues interviewed by this writer maintained that Liebling wrote about the press from the heart and without cynicism.

"He was not at all cynical," Shawn said. "There wasn't a drop of cynicism in the man. He really believed that he could do something about things. He honestly believed that he could have some effect. Every now and then he would come up to me and point to some little reform as being a product of his work."[10]

His efforts as a critic of the press brought Liebling many honors and outside activities. He was in demand as a public speaker although, by temperament, he was ill-suited for the role, often giggling embarrassingly and obviously ill at ease. He was also in demand for appearances on panels of various sorts. He substituted for Charles Collingwood on "WCBS-TV Views the Press" and also appeared on the radio precursor of that program, "CBS Views the Press." At the request of the Nieman Fellows, Liebling appeared at four of their discussion sessions at Harvard. He spoke before the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism in 1947 and the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1951. He was honored by the Newspaper Guild chapters of New York and Chicago. Early in 1963 Liebling was among 81 distinguished alumni honored by the Pulitzer School of Journalism at Columbia University.

After his death the International Labor Press Association honored Liebling by establishing the A. J. Liebling Memorial Lecture Series in 1964, an A. J. Liebling Journalism Award was set up on the West Coast, and the journalism review [*More*] has twice held "A. J. Liebling Counter-Conventions," gatherings of newsmen timed to coincide with the annual conventions of the American Newspaper Publishers Association that Liebling so delighted in deriding.

Finally, perhaps in the same spirit athletic teams retire their heroes' player numbers, *The New Yorker* has run no "Wayward Press" columns since Liebling's death.

[10] Interview, May 17, 1968.

# The Substance

In the original study upon which this monograph is based Liebling's published writings and speech manuscripts for the period 1935-63 were studied and all his references to the communications media and communicators were summarized. Because of its great length, that summary has itself been greatly condensed in order to be used in this monograph. What is said here is what can be described as the chief and most often made points in Liebling's work between 1935 and 1963. Following this summary is a set of criteria—Liebling's ideal of good journalistic practice as inferred from his writings.

The expression "the press" should be understood to refer to newspapers and occasionally the wire services, since the great bulk of Liebling's comments were about those institutions.

*Liebling's Case*

Liebling concentrated his criticism on the New York City newspapers in regard to specific handling of stories, but considered the American press as a whole in regard to broad general trends such as monopoly and competition. He was bothered by an increasing uniformity he observed within the press, a sameness of content and outlook that went with the increasing use of wire service and syndicated material in place of locally-written news. He saw the American press as a one-party press that was anti-labor. Access to the press was diminishing as costs grew. The press was a public utility in Liebling's eyes and he was bothered that the life or death of a paper could be decided by the advertising office of a New York department store. He detected a mistrust of the press in the American people.

Liebling described the *Times* and the *Herald Tribune* as the best of the New York papers for supplying information. He was fond of the *Post* and *PM* for their distinctive approaches to news reporting, at once liberal and entertaining, although he found fault in both. He condemned the *Daily News*, the *Daily Mirror*,

the *Journal-American* and the *World-Telegram and Sun* for their conservative bias, xenophobia, lack of real news and slipshod reporting, writing and editing. Of the New York newspapers then defunct, he thought highly of the *World* for its honesty and high standards. Other defunct New York papers, with the exception of *PM* and its successor, the *Star*, had more or less deserved their fates in his view.

The only paper from outside New York that Liebling paid much attention to was the Chicago *Tribune*. He said that there was little relation between reality and what the *Tribune* printed, it being largely an organ for publicizing the prejudices and pet projects of its publisher, Col. Robert R. McCormick. Liebling admired the Las Vegas *Sun* for its resemblance to a frontier paper. He had little to say about other American newspapers. He characterized the Hearst papers as a chain of bad papers that had not changed since 1909; and he dismissed the Scripps-Howard papers as white-collar versions of the Hearst papers. Liebling often expressed low regard for the wire services, saying that their news coverage was deficient and their stories not written with the needs of a metropolitan audience in mind.

Liebling said that publishers were the cause of most of the faults of newspapers. He characterized them as greedy, smug, clannish, reactionary, self-deluded and contemptuous of the press. He said their obsession with making money was crippling news coverage because publishers regarded news as a frill, with the result that less money was being put into competent reporting and more into buying the cheaper wire service and syndicated material. His bitterest targets were William Randolph Hearst, McCormick and Roy Howard. Hearst he characterized as an imitator who had changed the basis of newspapering by making it a game that only those with big money could play. McCormick was largely an object of ridicule for his pomposity, prejudices and personal causes. Howard was characterized as flashy, shallow, egotistical and miserly. The only publishers Liebling seemed to admire were the *Daily News*' Capt. J. M. Patterson—grudgingly and implicitly—for his grasp of the mind of the common man, and Hank Greenspun—openly—for his Las Vegas *Sun*.

Liebling disliked syndicated columnists because they drew off money that might have been spent on local, Washington and

foreign news coverage and because he saw them as agents of the publishers, writing to conform to the publishers' own world-views. He accused in particular Westbrook Pegler, George Sokolsky, David Lawrence and John O'Donnell. He thought Walter Lippmann too pretentious, but he admired Joseph Alsop for his impartiality and Max Lerner for his versatility. Liebling also scorned "experts" for their assumption of omniscience and their scorn of sound reporting practices.

Editors were suspected of being the agents of publishers but reporters were the downtrodden heroes; that is, unless they, too, were agents of publishers, as Bob Considine and Frank Conniff were said to be. Liebling praised good individual performances by reporters and condemned those he thought were bad. He usually named names.

Liebling pointed out many faults and weaknesses in the American newspaper press, using the New York newspapers to construct his case histories and supply his examples. He found a lack of diversity in the press. Competition was disappearing and monopoly was becoming the rule with a resulting sameness and scarcity of news. There was an inadequate effort to cover news at the source; few papers had correspondents in Washington or abroad and they were turning more and more to the wire services and syndicates for news matter. The papers were not willing to spend money for news coverage. There was poor judgment in the selection and use of news, stemming from Hearstian concepts of news as consisting only of blood, money and sex, concepts he felt were inadequate and out-of-date.

He saw a widespread misuse of the news columns for the promotion of political, economic, nationalistic and personal causes, manifested in bias in support of the Republican Party and against the poor and organized labor. The news columns were used for such political purposes as eliminating price controls and gaining enactment of the Taft-Hartley Act. There was inadequate reporting, writing and editing. Liebling found many errors, inconsistencies and contradictions in the press. Headlines sometimes did not reflect the stories that they topped; the writing was often poor. He saw a basic weakness in the editorial page which he attributed to editorial writers who were the hirelings of businessman-publishers. He felt they wrote not what they thought but

what they were told to think. The emergence of institutional advertising or the editorial-advertisement disturbed him because he saw in it a new weapon for the moneyed interests against labor and other disadvantaged groups. Finally, he detected a smugness that led the press to think of itself as infallible, refusing to admit error and reluctant to engage in mutual criticism.

Liebling paid relatively little attention to other media. He said that news magazines presented warmed-over newspaper dispatches and that there was too much of a tendency to decide in the home office where the truth was. He particularly accused *Time* of being subject to policy dictation, contemptuous of reporting and full of self congratulation. He characterized the trade publication *Editor & Publisher* as the handmaiden of the newspaper industry, equally sure that newspapers could do no wrong. Liebling thought of broadcast news as ancillary journalism, whose meager scraps of news were too highly priced in terms of time, inconvenience and annoyance. Liebling also wrote on the foreign press he had seen while abroad. The British press he characterized as skimpy in news but he admired the balance of views it presented the reader; the French press he characterized as lively but not very truthful, since each French paper found truth alone in its political vision. Liebling found the newspapers of Puerto Rico, Haiti and Tunis lively and interesting and those of Ciudad Trujillo (now Santo Domingo) distasteful.

Liebling had a generally negative view of journalism education. His own education at Columbia he regarded as inadequate and misdirected. He said that education for journalism was futile until publishers could be re-educated to their responsibilities. One of his most celebrated one-liners is contained in his dedication to *The Wayward Pressman:* "To the foundation of a school for publishers, failing which no school of journalism can have meaning." Later, however, he mellowed on this point. He began to see journalism schools as possible centers of qualitative criticism of press performance.

He predicted that "endowed" newspapers would appear in response to the trend toward monopoly and away from competition. He thought that New York might be a one- or two-newspaper town by 1975, although the *Times*, the *Daily News*, and the *Post* would survive initial consolidations. Liebling thought,

too, that hard news coverage would tend to disappear as competition diminished. He also thought that the number of newspaper jobs would diminish as well, thereby relieving the journalism schools of their function as trade schools.

Liebling also made some specific recommendations. He wanted new papers to appear and failing ones to survive. He thought that the capital gains tax should be raised to the level of the income tax to discourage the sale of newspapers. He opposed government-operated newspapers and government interference in the operation of newspapers. At various times he advocated the establishment of a "control" or model newspaper to provide a standard for comparing the truth in the regular newspapers. He wanted newspapers to be published only when there was sufficient hard news to justify publication. He advocated papers like the class Sunday papers of Britain, which he thought would restore political balance in the American press. He recommended that publishers be re-educated to know reality and appreciate their own responsibilities.

Liebling wanted more money spent on improved local news coverage and less on wire service and syndicated material. He advocated more careful reporting and better writing and more emphasis on backgrounding and interpretation. He recommended the use of teams of newsmen to check editorial-advertisements for accuracy. Finally, Liebling recommended that journalism schools become the Better Business Bureaus of the newspaper field by carrying out qualitative criticism. He thought that schools might also do research to find out why the press performed as it did and why publishers were as they were.

### *His Implied Criteria*

Liebling's general criteria for good journalistic practice may be inferred from the body of his critical writing:

- Publishers should learn, accept and discharge their responsibilities as directors of enterprises that operate under a Constitutional protection that makes them quasi-public utilities.
- The press should inform the people of the events and situations that have a real effect upon their lives and upon society as a whole.
- This information should be presented in a form that is clear, honest, accurate, fair, concise, meaningful, interesting and, where ap-

propriate, entertaining. Its placement and play within a newspaper should reflect its intrinsic importance and merit.

- The press should not subordinate its function of informing the people to that of making money, nor should it try to conceal the money-making function.
- The press in any community should be an expression of that community, tailoring its news coverage, selection and presentation to the needs of the community.
- Individual newspapers should try to offer the widest possible news coverage by their own reporters of local, national and foreign news. They should not depend for this on wire services and syndicates. They should give the reporter time and encouragement to dig out the facts of a story properly, and they should let him tell the story as he finds it.
- Cooperative newsgathering agencies should recognize the varying needs and interests of their subscribers' audiences and attempt to fulfill them rather than aim at a common denominator within the largest stratum of member publications.
- Newspapers should strive to present all points of view on controversial matters and to keep open all channels of information to the people.
- The news columns should be reserved for news, fairly, accurately and honestly presented; they should not be used to advance personal or partisan causes. At the very least, partisanship in the news columns should be overt, not covert.
- Where there is expression of opinion in the newspaper it should be clearly and meaningfully labeled as to its source.
- The strictures and conventions of "objective reporting" should be abandoned or modified in favor of reporting that makes news of events and situations meaningful by the inclusion of necessary background and interpretation. Those offering interpretation should do so on the basis of fact and observation, and not on the basis of intuition, bias, intellectual arrogance or assumed omniscience.
- Headlines should accurately reflect the true meaning and content of stories.
- The editorial page columns should be reserved for the honest personal opinions of editors.
- The press should admit its mistakes, avoiding any pretensions of infallibility or omniscience.
- The newspapers should accept and discharge their responsibility for mutual self-criticism, and should heed and respond to honest criticism.

- The press should allow journalists to function as members of a respected profession, preserving, especially, their integrity and *esprit de corps*.
- The press should unselfishly defend freedom of the press against encroachment from any direction.

It was a large order. The next concern is his method (how did he put his case together?), his effectiveness (how well did he present his case?) and finally the evaluation (what was it all worth?).

## An Evaluation

LIEBLING WAS not hired or retained by *The New Yorker* as a "critic of the press" but as a writer. He wrote hundreds of articles for *The New Yorker* other than his pieces on the press. Under a policy that encouraged its writers to be published elsewhere, Liebling collected his *New Yorker* articles in several books and also contributed pieces to *Esquire, Holiday, Vogue, Nieman Reports* and *Scribner's*. "Critic of the press" was a label applied to him by his readers. "The Wayward Press" was not a regular department in the same sense that other *New Yorker* departments dealt with systematic criticism of the arts. "The Wayward Press" was a heading under which articles about the press could be departmentalized. Other writers—among them E. J. Kahn Jr., John Hersey, Joseph Alsop and Faubion Bowers—wrote under that headline between 1945 and 1963. Liebling thus was not *the* press critic of *The New Yorker* as far as the staff was concerned.

It was the nature of the articles Liebling wrote on the press (*New Yorker* writers were not bound by strictures of "objective" reporting) that made him a critic in the sense of one who evaluates performance. At some point, certainly no later than the compilation of *The Wayward Pressman*, Liebling began to function in a dual role—that of an official reporter and of an unofficial critic or reviewer—and his articles on the press were reflective of these dual roles. When he was reporting on the performance of the press, evaluation often tended to creep in. Sometimes his articles were primarily evaluative pieces, yet the process of constructing a case to support his arguments would reveal him in his role as reporter. The "official" role, however, was always that of a reporter.

### *His Methods*

As a reporter Liebling wrote his pieces to inform and entertain his readers. As a reporter-critic he gathered his information in

much the saw way as the reviewer or critic for a newspaper or magazine might. He observed the "performance" and reported upon it, drawing not only upon observation but also upon his own background knowledge in light of his own standards. The columns were a largely disconnected series, such as many a newspaper or magazine reviewer might do. Two of his books on the press, *The Wayward Pressman* and *Mink and Red Herring*, reveal no formal organization beyond a loosely chronological reprinting of his "Wayward Presses." The autobiographical section of *The Wayward Pressman* and the foreword to *Mink and Red Herring*, however, set out some underlying themes. *The Press* was a more formal critical tract that tied together selected "Wayward Presses" and other articles into specific themes that summed up his thought over the years.

Liebling treated some topics regularly, such as pre- and post-election news coverage. Some columns were suggested by events such as the death of a publisher or of a newspaper, by strikes, or or the appearance of books on the press. Liebling did his own clipping from the newspapers he scanned, a method which proved to be fairly comprehensive for coverage of the New York newspapers but was haphazard for out-of-town papers, except those to which Liebling subscribed. Such subscriptions would not necessarily be renewed, however, after the piece in preparation was done. In the same way, the newspapers of a city might be thoroughly covered by Liebling when he was visiting there, but when he left that was the end of it until the next trip.

Liebling had friends on all the New York newspapers and on the news magazines based in that city. These could keep him supplied with "inside" information or could check out internal matters for him. He also received much mail telling him about things in distant cities that the writers felt he ought to be criticizing.

But Liebling did not limit his observation to the papers and his personal sources. He occasionally went right to the front office to check on some journalistic malpractice. For example, he stamped into the office of the editor of *The Daily Worker* to ask why it overestimated the crowd at a Henry Wallace speech and why it left out a statement by Wallace criticizing Russia. He checked directly with the Pentagon on the actual strength of the

Chinese Nationalist army. He read the minutes of Congressional hearings and the transcript of the Alger Hiss trial to lay a base for his examination of press treatment of that story. He studied newspaper files in the New York Public Library to check his impressions of how the press had acted in earlier days and devoured *Editor & Publisher* and George Seldes' *In Fact* to see how both critics and defenders portrayed the press in his day. *The New Yorker* provided him occasionally with research assistants.

Liebling did not conduct his research in the manner of the academician or professional researcher. His object was not to contribute to a body of knowledge, nor was he interested in quantitative methods. His methods were qualitative and impressionistic. Although he usually sought good case histories to support and illustrate his charges of journalistic malpractice, only his reading of the New York papers could be called systematic and he did not always read them with a specific purpose in mind.

In sum, Liebling used methods consistent with what the typical newspaper or magazine critic-reviewer-reporter might do. He observed some material comprehensively, some tangential material unsystematically; he used outside sources when observation was not enough. So, while Liebling's methods were not scholarly, on the level of popular criticism they were adequate. In any case it was the wit and humor of his writing, not his unique powers of observation, that gave his work a significant place among the critics of his day.

*His Writing Style*

By any standard, Liebling's writing style was difficult. His articles were usually long, complex and rambling. His sentences were often strewn with clauses, and clauses and phrases within clauses. Parentheses, asides and digressions abounded. He loved to display his vocabulary from archaic terms to neologisms; French words and phrases dotted his columns. There were many references to obscure persons, whom he wrote about as if everyone should know all about them, such as the Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldun, boxing historian Pierce Egan, boxers, thoroughbreds, Broadway characters; generals whom Liebling had met in France. He occasionally drew comparisons with journalistic figures, real and fictional, who flourished during his youth, such as the very

real Frank Ward O'Malley and the fictional Hildy Johnson of "The Front Page." It was almost demanded of the reader that he have some acquaintance with sports, for Liebling used the sports metaphor as if it were the only universally understandable language. For instance, the reader, in learning of Walter Lippmann's pique at President Truman in 1948, read it thus: "If Mr. Lippmann reminded me this time of a fight manager for whose protege an opponent has declined to go into the tank, it must be because I have always lived on a rather vulgar level."[1] Less often, Liebling lapsed into journalistic jargon and assumed that the reader knew all about shirttails, slopovers, mastheads, lobster shifts and the like.

Oddly, despite a wondrous vocabulary and an eagerness to display it, Liebling occasionally shied from a word that might identify him as an "intellectual." When a scientific or academic fad-word appeared—dichotomy, hubris, frame or reference—he would coyly cover his tracks by identifying the word as what "the quarterly-review boys" mistake for English. Liebling hated pretension and feared falling into it himself. The rich vocabulary of Damon Runyon's characters—and his own—was good enough.

Liebling once remarked that practice was needed to read *World-Telegram* headlines. To a certain extent the same was true of Liebling. The inexperienced reader of "The Wayward Press" could not always be sure whether Liebling was pulling his leg. One of his stock weapons was sarcasm. Although Colonel McCormick must have been the favorite target for his deferential descriptions, he reserved some of his sharpest jabs for fellow writers: "Naturally, it never entered my mind that anybody would not take a Lippmann suggestion seriously . . ."[2] or "I was loath to think of . . . Mr. Arthur Krock . . . as a man susceptible of successful contradiction."[3]

The sarcasm might be slipped in deftly: reading *Time* as an occasion for deep thinking; or repeated references to the Chicago *Tribune* as the World's Greatest Newspaper.

Despite stylistic complexities, Liebling was an extremely entertaining writer. Humor ran through all his work. Perhaps his

[1] "Hot and Heated," *The New Yorker*, August 14, 1948, p. 74.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] "Who Won What?" *The New Yorker*, November 22, 1952, p. 141.

only dead-serious "Wayward Press" was his first, in which he vented his fury over the frustrations of wartime reporting. His humor often took the form of ridicule. He rarely moralized, preferring to make his points through satire and caricature to deflate the subjects of his scorn. He often depended on the very silliness of his subjects' statements or actions, to which he added just a few words of his own. Speaking of Westbrook Pegler, Liebling wrote:

> Peg was taking up for Ezra Pound, who, he said, was not insane enough to deserve being confined in an insane asylum by an arbitrary court ruling; what he did deserve, since he had certainly adhered to the enemy in wartime, was to be tried for treason and, if found guilty (which Peg said he was), shot. The argument, as I got it, was that it was an injustice to Pound not to shoot him, and I wondered if Pound resented it as much as Pegler.[4]

Liebling might achieve his effect by mimicking his subject, as when he pointed out the portentousness of George Sokolsky's Sunday columns in the *Journal-American*—written in the third person—by sprinkling through his commentary scornful double attributions such as " 'Sokolsky points out,' pointed out Sokolsky . . . ," " 'Sokolsky warns,' warned Sokolsky . . ." and " 'Sokolsky notes,' noted Sokolsky. . . ."[5]

He occasionally made his point by accepting statements literally and then musing about their ludicrous implications. In a *Journal-American* obituary of Al Capone, Liebling espied a bit of hyperbole that said "the guns of the 'Big Fellow' were always hot and smoking." Liebling mused: ". . . I let myself float along the stream of understatement, trying lazily to calculate how much small-arms ammunition it would take to keep just one gun hot 24 hours a day for an era."[6] Only rarely, because he preferred to devastate by understatement, would Liebling allow himself to say outright how silly some of the prose in the press was.

Liebling's use of ridicule, and the fact that he rarely let up,

[4] "New York Revisited," in *The Press* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), p. 280.

[5] "W. R. Jr. in the U.S.S.R.," *The New Yorker*, February 27, 1954, *passim*.

[6] "Mr. Capone and Other Primates," in *The Wayward Pressman* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday), 1947, p. 245.

puts him squarely in the mainstream of an American journalistic tradition—needling. Smith and Knox's criteria for journalistic needling fit Liebling closely:

> The true Needler may be identified 1) by close identification with his public, as indicated by the earthiness of his comment and style; 2) dependence upon media of communication reaching the largest possible public; and 3) the purposeful application of humor and satire. Unlike the gag writers, the Needler was more intent on slipping the banana peel under the toe of pomposity than in affording passing amusement with a whiff of laughter.[7]

One of Liebling's favorite devices in applying the needle was that of playing the credulous reader who accepts at face value what he reads and who is, therefore, confused because of the inconsistencies and inaccuracies he finds.

In addition to humor, Liebling offered the reader an almost boundless imagination that could come up with unlikely imagery to drive home a point. Liebling characterized the press as a 100-story-high tuna cannery understaffed with fishermen; he compared the press—crushed by its misappraisal of President Truman's chances for election in 1948—to the walls of Jericho, flattened, but only temporarily, because they were composed of self-rising flour. In describing Pegler's performance during the national party conventions in 1948, Liebling said:

> Mr. Pegler goes into his famous necrophagous dance, a double-shuffle on a headstone, finishing with a high kick, as if trying to reach a ghost. . . .
>
> Mr. Pegler does a syndicated pit-show routine, like a geek biting off the head of a live chicken, except he used the head of Sidney Hillman, a dead labor leader.[8]

If there were difficulties in his style, Liebling's writing was nevertheless replete with the rewards of humor and imagery that could hold and bring back readers, particularly *The New Yorker*'s urbane, sophisticated audience.

[7] Henry Ladd Smith and James Knox, "The Needlers: Our Journalistic Satirists," *Journalism Quarterly*, 39:3 (Summer 1962), p. 309.

[8] "Hot and Heated," p. 72.

*Evidence*

Liebling leveled his criticism on more than one level and the kinds of evidence he offered varied with the level of criticism. He might, for instance, discourse on a high and general level on the trend toward monopoly within American journalism. Or he might criticize the handling of individual stories or headlines. In "The Great Gouamba" he even took critical notice of the handling of a subhead.[9]

On the more general level, Liebling tended to offer sweeping generalizations. In criticizing specific stories he named names and he quoted profusely. He made it easy for the reader to check his facts by naming authors, dates and publications and by identifying outside materials specifically.

Documenting the growth of monopoly and the restriction of competition in the newspaper field was easy. Liebling needed to point only to the available statistics—the decreasing number of cities with competing papers or ownerships and the demise of specific newspapers, or their sales. But when it came to discussing causes Liebling tended to resort to rhetoric rather than evidence. He did not attempt to trace the evolution of the newspaper within its own social and economic environment but tended to rely on generalizations, such as that publishers could make more money by eliminating competition or that the government made the sale of a newspaper more lucrative than its operation because of the capital gains tax. Liebling worked from the assumption that lessening competition was evil. Ironically, the only competitive situation that he studied closely and systematically—New York—was the least monopolistic in the nation.

To make his point he might, in the end, cry in exasperation that it was not right that a citizen's access to news was aleatory, depending on which monopoly city he might be living in. But this ignored the fact that almost all of life is aleatory, depending on all sorts of accidents and coincidences. Or he might lead himself into such a nonsequitur as: "A young Philadelphian entering journalism today [1947] has three possible employers, the *Inquirer*, the *Bulletin* and the tabloid *Daily News*. . . . If he

[9] "The Great Gouamba," in *The Press*, p. 97.

works for any of these papers his judgment of public affairs had better be conservative Republican."[10]

These higher levels of generalization were not characteristic of Liebling's "Wayward Press" pieces which, in the original, usually focused on New York journalism. They tended to appear in his books, speeches and outside articles. If the reader had the uneasy feeling, when reading the original articles in *The New Yorker*, that Liebling was really talking about American journalism, this feeling must have been confirmed when, in *The Wayward Pressman*, Liebling said he considered the faults of the press similar nationwide and that the New York papers were an adequate sample of the American press.

In constructing his case histories Liebling drew upon newspaper reading for the evidence. He compared the stories in different newspapers. His *magnum opus* based on this line of inquiry was his article on the "rubber-type army," in which he followed for days reports and statements on the size of the Nationalist Chinese army. He noted fluctuations in its reported size from 300,000 to a million, and the straight-faced manner in which the press reported conflicting figures without trying to sort out the confusion for their readers. But Liebling occasionally, sometimes peevishly, could stretch attention to detail into nitpicking.

Liebling loved to prick "experts" for their occasional silliness or their errors and inconsistencies. He noted that Lippmann had called upon the Democrats to put up only a token presidential candidate because they could not win in 1948. Lippmann had even suggested that President Truman resign in favor of the Republican candidate after the approaching election. But, after the election, Lippmann termed the Democratic victory no real surprise since there were more registered Democrats than Republicans. Grist for Liebling's mill. Similarly, Liebling noted that before the invasion at Inchon in Korea, David Lawrence had poured scorn over the integration of the armed forces and had especially decried the reliability of air support. Immediately after the invasion, Lawrence wrote ecstatically about how well integration was going and how wonderfully the Air Force had supported the invasion, hinting the while that he had known about the invasion plan all along.

[10] *The Wayward Pressman*, p. 31.

Liebling documented the weaknesses in wire service coverage in his pieces on the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, meticulously tracing, in "Goodbye, M.B.I.," the errant path of the story through Associated Press channels. He documented anti-labor bias in the press point-by-point in his article on the Long Island Rail Road strike.

The chauvinism of the press was a favorite target. To illustrate its smugness he seized upon Frank Conniff's comment, in the *Journal-American*, on the death of the *Star:* "The deceased," Conniff wrote, "was never a good newspaper. The *Star* consumed its energies poking derision at its betters without bothering to observe the fundamentals of our craft. . . ."[11] Liebling, "eager to observe the fundamentals of Mr. Conniff's craft," took apart the issue of the *Journal-American* in which Conniff's comment had appeared, noting, for instance, that there were 18 columns of general news, much of it sex and crime. Roughly four columns of the 18 were devoted to a contest involving the presentation of orchids to pretty office workers. He counted 34 columns devoted to the output of 26 columnists, including Conniff.

But Liebling himself was not immune to occasional overstatement, nonsequitur, silliness or the journalistic "elbow pool" he took others to task for. Among his wild swings was the contention that the *Daily News* opposed school bond issues because it feared that a higher standard of education would threaten its circulation. Or that word had spread among the newspapers that no one was willing to check the other fellow's figure on the "rubber-type army." Or that the *Sun*—which he did not read regularly until 1946—had never been a good paper since the days of Charles Dana. Or that newspapers spent all their money on promotions. Liebling tried to link the reduction in the *Post*'s Washington staff to the death of the *Sun*, although he had said more than once that the readerships of the two politically disparate afternoon papers were unlikely to overlap.

Sometimes Liebling reached so far that he himself came off sounding a little silly, as when he said:

> The very existence of the *Times* sports section marked a concession to frivolity on the part of Adolph Ochs, the great merchandiser of

[11] Cited in "Toward a One-Paper Town," in *The Press*, p. 49.

stodginess, but the old man had determined that if he had to have a sports page at all, it would be as uninteresting as possible.[12]

Liebling chided the *World-Telegram* for journalistic "elbow pool" in trying to sneak into a story an unjustifiable connection between Henry Wallace and spying for Russia, but when Liebling wanted to make an equally unsupportable assertion he at least once used the same device himself. Speaking of the extensive coverage given by New York papers to the publishers at the ANPA convention, Liebling said: "A suspicion has been voiced by cynics that this flattering free space is related to the fact that every newspaper in New York has some sort of news service or feature service to peddle and the visitors are potential customers."[13] The "cynics," of course, were not identified, just as the "observers" who so often pass along other reporters' views under the guise of an anoymous source usually are not.

In summary, Liebling was usually quite specific in documenting his charges of journalistic weakness and malpractice. Just as the reviewer or critic might bolster his criticism by looking to the observed performance for evidence, Liebling usually looked to his clippings and offered them as evidence of shallow, inadequate or sloppy journalism. On the higher plane of general trends, Liebling was only as specific as the statistics he could quote. Not having done the research needed to support such generalizations, he tended to fall back on hyperbole and did occasionally fall into overstatement and error.

*Objectivity*

Liebling's one-sideness is abundantly clear. He made no pretense of objectivity. Liebling's attitude toward the press was one of love and hate, and this was manifested in the negative bent of his criticism. He set out to find fault, not to praise. In this way his criticism lacked both objectivity and balance. To his credit, he cheerfully admitted his one-sidedness.

Liebling's basic ideas on the press were formed before he became a critic and they changed but little over the 18 years that he wrote "The Wayward Press." He was saying the same things

[12] *The Wayward Pressman*, p. 51.

[13] "Not Too Lopsided," *The New Yorker*, May 9, 1953, p. 110.

in the 1960s as in the 1940s: that publishers were no good for the press, competition was being throttled by monopoly, news was being pushed out of the newspapers, and press performance was inadequate because being good didn't pay. There was little evolution of ideas in the body of Liebling's criticism.

These ideas about the press were derived from several sources—Liebling's early experiences on newspapers, his fixation on New York, and, most of all, his political, social and economic ideas.

Liebling was a newspaperman in an unhappy time, 1926 to 1935. In 1926-29, despite general prosperity, businessmen were almost absolute masters of their houses and the economic lot of newspapermen was not a happy one. Thereafter came the Depression. Liebling, a sensitive man, saw much unhappiness around him, and the sharp contrast between his milieu and that of the rich owners affected him.

Although Liebling was bothered by the low pay in the newspaper field, he himself was relatively well off during most of his newspaper career, especially during the Depression. And he was never out of work for long. His top weekly pay rates were: *Times*, $50; *Journal*, $63; *Sunday World*, $75 (though he sometimes got it up to $100); *World-Telegram*, $75; King Features, $85. Although he started at $75 at the *World-Telegram* his pay was twice cut during the Depression, down to an eventual $60.75. He started with *The New Yorker* at $65, but within a year this was raised to a drawing account of $90. Liebling had been reporting and rewriting for *The New Yorker* as early as 1934, so there had been extra money coming in even then. He was not a victim of unemployment or pittance pay as were so many others during the Depression. And his level of prosperity rose steadily after his first year on *The New Yorker*.

Liebling was a New Yorker by birth and choice, and he tended to see the world in terms of New York. He considered, more seriously than not, anything west of the Hudson as a wasteland. His "Wayward Presses" reflected this. Sixty-five of the 83 pieces were primarily about New York papers and three others were about New York publishers. Liebling's implied criteria for good journalistic practice reflect this concentration on New York journalism.

Most important, though, were his political, social and economic

ideas, which were, in general, opposed to those of publishers. The theme of the wrong-headedness of publishers runs throughout Liebling's work. His world was one of conflict: rich vs. poor, employer vs. employee, publisher vs. journalist, press vs. people, powerful vs. weak, conservative vs. liberal, Republican vs. Democrat. He took sides in these conflicts, and his criticism of the press was his contribution to the good fight. Liebling was liberal, libertarian, pro-labor, anti-business and Democratic. He did not hide these things. In fact he wore them all on his sleeve. His strictures regularly fell most heavily on the more conservative columnists—Pegler, Sokolsky, O'Donnell and Lawrence—whom he saw as agents of the conservative publishers. On the other hand, Liebling could treat the liberal *Post*, *PM* and *Star* almost lovingly, despite an occasional lover's quarrel.

The sale of the *World*s and its aftermath set his thinking about publishers, to whom he almost automatically assigned the faults of the press. Their motives were always suspect. When a flood of newspaper and magazine reporters went overseas during World War II, Liebling declared that the publishers spent money to avoid the excess profits tax. Many other examples of this basic negativism or perversity appear in his work.

Liebling often complained that publishers were unwilling to admit error. He was not unwilling to admit error himself, especially when the error was picayune or when letters from readers brought him up short. But occasionally he was less than gracious about it. He printed the rejoinder of a *Sun* staffer to his description of that paper, but he added his own rebuttal in the form of footnotes, some clearly designed to make the *Sun* man look foolish. Similarly, when Liebling complained that more editorial-advertisement space had been used in the *Times* by management than by labor, he hinted that the *Times*'s power to reject ads had something to do with this. Arthur Hays Sulzberger replied that no ads from labor had been rejected by the *Times*. Somewhat peevishly, Liebling persisted lamely:

> Mr. Sulzberger missed the point; it is not accidental that management has more money than labor and will always be able to buy more space. In any contest conducted by means of paid advertising, therefore, labor must always be at a disadvantage.[14]

[14] "Little Landslide," in *The Wayward Pressman*, p. 157.

Equally peevish, maybe even rancorous, was Liebling's only reference to criticism of his work, specifically a review of *The Wayward Pressman* that appeared in the *Journal-American*. Without naming the writer, he commented:

> A fellow who was then 5th-string Pegler on the *Journal-American*, trying to make Team D and get his name in the souvenir program, said that I must be exactly like Vishinsky, trying to strangle the last free thing on earth, by which I assume he meant the Hearst press.[15]

In summary, Liebling's criticism was neither objective nor balanced. He operated from the same set of preconceptions throughout. His criticism mostly found fault and was occasionally perverse and reluctant to give credit where it was due. He admitted his own errors, though not always graciously.

*Recommendations*

Liebling offered relatively little in the way of explicit schemes, suggestions or recommendations for improvement of press performance. Some that he did suggest were impractical, unlikely to happen or only half-serious. His major answer to the problem of spreading monopoly was the endowment of newspapers by citizens' groups, labor unions or political parties. He would have set up a structure that paralleled the commercial press. It was a popular notion at the time, perhaps based on the excellence and independence of *The Christian Science Monitor*.

He also advocated Camus' "control" newspaper, also popular at the time. The suggestion that newspapers publish only on days when there is enough news was probably only half-serious, as was his idea to re-educate publishers.

Liebling suggested that newspapers spend less money on syndicated and wire service material and more on reporting by their own staff members. Since then press services have offered more diversity and the quality of the new ones, such as the Los Angeles Times-Washington Post Syndicate has improved journalism. A movement within the press to develop local specialized writers in science, education and urban affairs is within the spirit of Liebling's recommendation. But the tendency has been, instead, for

[15] *Mink and Red Herring* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1949), p. 10.

newspaper groups to set up bureaus to serve all of their members. These are "local" reporters only in the broadest sense.

Liebling wanted more backgrounding and interpretation in news stories to make them more meaningful. Both of these have been steadily on the rise in the American press, but as part of a trend that antedated Liebling. He also recommended that journalism schools involve themselves in qualitative criticism of newspaper performance. There has not been a wholesale movement in this direction but there has been some movement. Courses or parts of courses aimed at fostering critical appraisal have become common and academicians themselves have been acting as critics or helping to put out critical journals, and they have worked together to establish agencies for press appraisal.

Liebling had relatively little to offer in the way of suggestions and recommendations because his orientation was narrow and he tended to look back. His orientation was toward newspapers alone. It bothered him that television had done so much to shape the public images of the presidential candidates in 1960. He scorned election coverage by the broadcast media. He looked backward to an era when headlines shaped public opinion, when competition and enterprise were the rule, and when people might have the time and inclination to read more than one newspaper. He did not accept the fact that the newspaper could become merely one among several media providing news and information. His scorn for the broadcast media as ancillary prevented him from foreseeing such developments as expanded TV coverage and all-news radio. These limitations certainly hampered his ability to offer useful and original suggestions for improving the press.

### *Influence*

Liebling himself made no claim to any particular influence as a critic. No great revolution in press performance has appeared in the wake of Liebling's criticism. The trend toward monopoly has continued, no endowed press has appeared, there has been no particular inclination by newspapers to expand their staff coverage at the expense of wire service or syndicated material, the press is still largely conservative, and error, sloppiness, ineptitude and misleading headlines are still in evidence. Nor are there

outward signs of penitence for the sins that Liebling exposed. There has been no rush to adopt any schemes suggested by Liebling. The *Times*, *Daily News* and *Post* have changed but little since Liebling's first "Wayward Press." The *Herald Tribune*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sun*, *Journal-American*, *World-Telegram* and both *PM* and its brief successor, the *Star*, are simply gone.

Even if careful content analysis of the New York papers from the date of Liebling's first "Wayward Press" might reveal some improvement, these could scarcely be attributed to his influence. Changes in management, personnel and policies would have to be responsible. But his criticisms reached a wide audience. *The Press* sold well, diffusing Liebling's ideas far beyond New York. He was popular among newsmen in New York, some of whom have moved on to positions of responsibility and leadership in the press. His ideas and criticisms have been widely examined and discussed in schools of journalism, where his memory is strong and fresh.

To what extent he helped establish a climate favorable to criticism of press performance or formed and modified attitudes of newsmen can never be known. The fact that he is still being studied is indicative of something. But Liebling enjoyed antagonizing the very people who could make significant changes, the publishers, many of whom saw his work as carping or destructive. It could not have been easy to take seriously the critic who would burlesque the dead-serious recommendation of the Hutchins Commission for a press-appraisal agency by suggesting instead a competition to determine who in the press was the biggest liar.

Was he a good prophet? He said that New York might be a one- or two-newspaper town by 1975. The field there is already down to three, but further contraction does not seem likely. Liebling was right, in general, about how the contractions would take place in each field—morning highbrow, morning lowbrow, and evening. He thought the survivors would swallow the victims, but they just disappeared. In the evening field he called his shot almost perfectly, only missing out on the *Herald Tribune* joining an ill-fated afternoon combination. He was right about the continued expansion of monopoly and contraction of competition, but not about the rise of endowed papers, the contraction of newspaper jobs, the proliferation of erudite experts among foreign

correspondents, nor the abandonment of wire service and syndicated material when competition reached near-zero. Whether there is now less blind acceptance of and acquiescence in national policy by the newspapers is problematical and beyond the scope of this study.

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How well did Joe Liebling perform as a critic of the press?

He wrote well and interestingly and his work reached a large audience. His methods of studying the press were not systematic and he often lapsed into rhetoric. His criticism was neither objective nor balanced, nor did he mean it to be.

Just as he would have had the public read the newspapers skeptically, so must Liebling himself be read skeptically. He spoke out on many important subjects, but his ideas changed little in 18 years. Although he will probably be long remembered for his skill as a writer, it seems unlikely that most of his criticism of the press will survive. What he wrote was about contemporary events and persons. As time goes on, nuances that depended on familiarity with the quirks and peccadilloes of Liebling's subjects will simply vanish. Furthermore, Liebling looked back, not forward. He was trying to restore an old order, even while hoping to improve it. It seems likely, therefore, that most of his press criticism must eventually become historical curiosity like Upton Sinclair's *The Brass Check,* Oswald Garrison Villard's *Some Newspapers and Newspapermen* and George Seldes' *Lords of the Press* and *In Fact.*

But even if the specifics of his press criticism may not endure, Liebling's place in journalism history seems secure. He was a pioneer critic of the press, and one of the very few voices speaking out in his own generation. Perhaps he helped shape the ideas of some journalists and journalists-to-be. He was a skillful writer and satirist and even if all these are not enough, his consummate skill as a reporter and essayist should assure him a place in the annals of his profession.

# Annotated Bibliography

*A. J. Liebling's Principal Works on the Press*

The annotated bibliography covers 1935-63, when Liebling was on the staff of *The New Yorker* but occasionally writing for other periodicals. Articles published in 1964 were, of course, posthumous. There is no evidence that he published any press criticism before he joined *The New Yorker.*

The bibliography has been divided into three subsections, and the listing within each is chronological. All of the "Wayward Press" articles appeared in *The New Yorker.*

### Major Books on the Press

*The Wayward Pressman.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1948. 284 pp.

About half autobiographical and half a collection of "Wayward Press" articles. The former is a collection of incidents and recollections to set out how Liebling's outlook on the press developed. The "Wayward Press" articles cover the period May 1945-March 1947.

*Mink and Red Herring: The Wayward Pressman's Casebook.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1949. 251 pp.

A collection of "Wayward Press" articles mostly from the period immediately following *The Wayward Pressman*—August 1947-March 1949.

*The Press.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1961, second edition 1964. 293 pp. (only in paperback).

"Wayward Press" articles, including some reprinted in *The Wayward Pressman* and *Mink and Red Herring.* Most of the selections, however, were written in the Fifties.

### "The Wayward Press"

"The A.P. Surrender," May 19, 1945, pp. 57-62.

A defense of correspondent Edward Kennedy, who filed the story of the German surrender in 1945 despite a tacit commitment to wait for Army permission before its release. Also about the problems caused for reporters

by Army public information men and the stranglehold on news held by the major wire service correspondents.

"No Papers," July 28, 1945, pp. 44-8.

Newspapers are seen in a new light after a 17-day newspaper strike in New York. Liebling proposes that they be published only when there is news to report, with supplements in between for essential matter.

"Obits," Jan. 19, 1946, pp. 50-55.

The New York newspapers gave better play to the obituary of Gen. George S. Patton than to that of writer Theodore Dreiser.

"Mayor Into Columnist," Feb. 23, 1946, pp. 56-61.

The first newspaper columns written by former Mayor LaGuardia. Comment on the unwritten code forbidding mutual criticism among publishers and newspapermen.

"Papers Within Papers," March 30, 1946, pp. 60-65.

Editorials appearing as paid advertisements in the press fill Liebling with misgivings about a new weapon in the hands of moneyed interests.

"Mamie and Mr. O'Donnell Carry On," June 8, 1946, pp. 90-98.

The treatment of the death of Capt. J. M. Patterson, publisher of the *Daily News*, in the New York press and the papers run by his cousins in Chicago and Washington.

"And the Sun Stood Still," Aug. 3, 1946, pp. 46-51.

Concludes that the 1946 version of the *Sun* is essentially unchanged from the lethargic, soporific journal of 1926.

"Antepenultima·um," Sept. 7, 1946, pp. 59-62.

A complaint about the overfree use of the word "ultimatum" in the press.

"For the Defense," Sept. 14, 1946, pp. 93-5.

A letter from an indignant staff member of the *Sun*, who contends that "And the Sun Stood Still," was unfair and inaccurate. Liebling defends himself.

"The Scribes of Destiny," Sept. 28, 1946, pp. 50-61.

Liebling examines the overdramatic and clichéd jargon of the newspaper sports writers.

"Two Pounds for a Dime," Nov. 2, 1946, pp. 82-9.

A lampoon of articles about the "alien East" which appeared in the Chicago *Tribune*.

"Little Landslide," Nov. 16, 1946, pp. 71-8.

The overuse of the word "landslide" in election reporting and jabs at the *Daily News* straw poll and Senator Fulbright.

"The Great Gouamba," Dec. 7, 1946, pp. 88-97.

Reporting of the great meat shortage of 1946, which, Liebling contends, was a hoax to have price controls removed.

"Who Killed the Monkey?" Jan. 8, 1947, pp. 66-73.

The rancor in the Philadelphia papers over the selection of New York as the headquarters of the United Nations.

"Mr. Capone and Other Primates," March 1, 1947, pp. 61-7.

Comment on the unexpected reaction of the press to the death of Al Capone. Also, comment on silliness in reporting of the "Black Dahlia" murder and the escape of a monkey in New York.

"Back to Before Van Buren," March 22, 1947, pp. 62-8.

Miscellaneous happenings illustrating frailties of the press.

"Boomerangs and Duds," Aug. 16, 1947, pp. 74-82.

Illustrations of "Liebling's Law"—the "discovery" by the *Herald Tribune* of the potential gag on freedom of the press in the Taft-Hartley Act and the *Sun's* abortive revelations of laxity in security in the atomic energy program.

"Probe Use Hit in Press Flay; Reds' Button Attack Bared," Sept. 6, 1947, pp. 54-60.

The *World-Telegram*'s fondness for headline words that express physical violence and the word "probe." Also, comment on the quality of wire service news coverage.

"The Case of the Moistened Milk," Oct. 4, 1947, pp. 54-66.

Quaint goings-on reported in *La Voix du Bocage*, a paper published in Vire, France.

"We Adopt the Party Line," Oct. 18, 1947, pp. 67-76.

The U.S. restrictions on a French Communist reporter are decried. *Time*'s attempt to censor its employees' outside writing and speaking is cited.

"The Impossible Headline," Oct. 28, 1947, pp. 67-72.

The papers are reluctant to see or admit that food prices are going up after the abandonment of the Office of Price Administration.

"Preliminary Bout," Nov. 1, 1947, pp. 74-9.

A strike at a race track brings out interesting variations in the usual alignment of the papers on labor issues.

"A Long Drawn Out OOOH," Nov. 8, 1947, pp. 79-86.

How the New York papers reported the testimony of film stars and writers before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Liebling received a letter from a publisher who says he once admitted having been wrong.

"Horsefeathers Swathed in Mink," Nov. 22, 1947, pp. 66-73.

The *Times* and *World-Telegram*, in particular, are faulted for their handling of welfare scandal revelations, the "Lady in Mink" story.

"A Ringside Seat at the Wedding," Dec. 6, 1947, pp. 124-30.

Coverage of the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Philip Mountbatten.

"The M.B.I.," Jan. 3, 1948, pp. 46-50.

Liebling discovers, in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, a little noticed story about the formation of a secret police force in Mississippi and the enactment of death-penalty laws to deal with bus-strike violence.

"Goodbye, M.B.I.," Feb. 7, 1948, pp. 54-9.

Liebling traces the path of the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation story and wonders how many other stories of real importance are lost in the wire service mazes.

"Caribbean Excursion," April 10, 1948, pp. 60-67.

The volatile newspapers of San Juan and Port-au-Prince and the docile newspaper of Ciudad Trujillo.

"Rooks Can't Hit Back," July 10, 1948, pp. 44-52.

A dispute in the British press over extermination of rooks is compared to the dispute over the abolition of capital punishment.

"Hot and Heated," Aug. 14, 1948, pp. 72-80.

Coverage of the national political conventions, particularly by the columnists.

"All About Inside-Policy Data," Aug. 28, 1948, pp. 40-45.

Liebling accuses the press of complicity in the "character murder" being carried out in testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

"At the Sign of the Red Herring," Sept. 4, 1948, pp. 54-60.

How the press latched onto the phrase "red herring."

"The Potomac, the Stadium, and the South," Sept. 25, 1948, pp. 62-8.

Coverage, in New York papers, of a campaign speech by Harold Stassen; moderation of attitude in the papers toward Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace, and a good job of covering his southern tour by North Carolina papers.

"Re-De-Secretization," Oct. 23, 1948, pp. 78-87.

Espionage "revelations" in the *World-Telegram* are found to have been reported long ago, then made secret, and then reported again as new revelations.

"Peg Gives Up on the U.S.A.," Nov. 20, 1948, pp. 67-75.

The press tried to figure out, after President Truman's surprise election, what happened. Liebling savors the embarrassment of those who wrongly reported that Dewey had won.

"Toward a One-Paper Town," Feb. 12, 1949, pp. 53-8.

Comment upon the death of the *Star*, the successor to *PM*. Criticism of the *Journal-American*'s "shooting at lifeboats" for implying that *PM* and *Star* staff members were Communists.

"The Doldrums: George and Danny," March 12, 1949, pp. 56-62.

Coverage of Gorgeous George's New York wrestling debut and Danny Gardella's antitrust suit against professional baseball.

"La Presse Capricieuse," March 19, 1949, pp. 58-69.

Reporting of a murder trial in Paris illustrates Liebling's contention that each of the Parisian newspapers has its own conception of truth.

"London Terrace and the Wild West," March 26, 1949, pp. 93-100.

Similarities and discrepancies in New York papers' coverage of a triple murder and a train robbery.

"100,000—Count Em—1,000," April 9, 1949, pp. 64-70.

The hostility of the New York papers toward the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace.

"Right Up Louella's Ali," June 11, 1949, pp. 86-93.

A sarcastic description of coverage of the Ali Khan-Rita Hayworth wedding.

"Spotlight on the Jury," July 23, 1949, pp. 60-68.

Newspapers' interviews with jurors after the first trial of Alger Hiss and

the subsequent campaign to have the judge investigated for alleged bias against the prosecution.

"Aspirins for Atoms, Down With Babushkas!" Jan. 7, 1950, pp. 52-9.

The Chicago *Tribune*, particularly its civil defense plans, its touting of the Tribune Tower, its campaign against babushkas and its efforts to show that Chicago has a heart of gold.

"Cassandra on Lake Michigan," Jan. 14, 1950, pp. 68-74.

More sarcastic comments on the Chicago *Tribune*.

"The Colonel's Formula," Jan. 21, 1950, pp. 54-65.

The Chicago *Tribune*'s headlines and its partiality toward violent crimes.

" 'Dismally' Was the Word," Jan. 28, 1950, pp. 76-85.

The passing of the *Sun*. The *Sun* and the *World-Telegram* were almost redundant and department-store advertisers decided in favor of the *World-Telegram*. Hence the *World-Telegram & Sun*.

"The Colonel Looks on Marathon," March 25, 1950, pp. 97-105.

The progress of Col. Robert R. McCormick, publisher of the Chicago *Tribune*, as he reports on a trip through Europe and Asia.

"Infantry War Again," Aug. 12, 1950, pp. 48-55.

The similarities among "sneak attacks" since the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The first few days' coverage of the Korean War, with high praise for Homer Bigart of the *Herald Tribune*.

"The Oracles of Mars," Oct. 21, 1950, pp. 107-27.

The omniscience affected by "expert" military writers, in this case *Time*, Max Werner of the *Daily Compass*, and David Lawrence.

"The Oracles of Mars—Continued," Oct. 28, 1950, pp. 88-97.

More on the military "experts," this time Hanson Baldwin of the *Times* and Joseph Alsop.

"Peg and Sock," Nov. 18, 1950, pp. 119-29.

A critique of the stable of columnists maintained by the *Journal-American*.

"When the Electorate Rocked," Nov. 25, 1950, pp. 86-105.

Mud-slinging by the candidates in the New York gubernatorial and New York City mayoral election campaigns.

"The Rubber-Type Army," April 7, 1951, pp. 65-9.

Liebling reaches the high point of his lampooning of how the press

handles figures and statistics, cataloging the wild fluctuations in the reported size of the Nationalist Chinese Army.

"The Rubber-Type Army: A Postscript," April 28, 1951, pp. 102-8.

Further fluctuations in the size of the Rubber-Type Army and reaction to the removal of Gen. Douglas MacArthur from command in Korea.

"The Man Who Changed the Rules," Sept. 8, 1951, pp. 63-79.

An assessment of the late William Randolph Hearst, whose real impact was to make publishing a field exclusively for people with a lot of money.

"Items on the Islands," Sept. 6, 1952, pp. 92-100.

Items from papers in the Windward and Leeward Islands.

"Who Won What?" Nov. 22, 1952, pp. 139-46.

Assessments of the Eisenhower election victory in the New York press and the Chicago *Tribune*.

"Listen, Friends—Please Listen," Dec. 13, 1952, pp. 103-9.

An interview with a man who bought newspaper space to say that seven New York papers endorsed Eisenhower. An instance of the *Journal-American*'s calling the *World-Telegram* a liar by name.

"Footnotes on a Journey," Dec. 20, 1952, pp. 60-68.

First reports, in the New York papers, of President-elect Eisenhower's trip to Korea.

"V-Day in Court," Feb. 28, 1953, pp. 66-71.

The uproar in the press over the exclusion of the press and public from part of the Jelke vice trial.

"Death on the One Hand," March 28, 1953, pp. 105-16.

Newspaper stories during the period in which Stalin lay near death. The proliferation of on-the-one-hand-this-and-on-the-other-hand-that reporting among the journalistic seers.

"Not Too Lopsided," May 9, 1953, pp. 110-19.

The attention paid by the New York press to publishers at the annual meeting of the American Newspaper Publishers Association. Their efforts to shoot down the "one-party press" charge made against American papers.

"More News Behind the News," Aug. 1, 1953, pp. 44-50.

The return of on-the-one-hand-this-and-on-the-other-hand-that reporting after the arrest of Beria.

"Of Yesteryear—I," Nov. 7, 1953, pp. 89-102.

At the beginning of the Eisenhower era, Liebling looks back at New York papers at the beginning of the Franklin Roosevelt era, starting with the *World-Telegram and Sun* and the *Post*.

"Of Yesteryear—II," Nov. 14, 1953, pp. 134-43.

The *Journal-American* of 1953 compared with its predecessors of 1933.

"Of Yesteryear—III," Nov. 21, 1953, pp. 197-208.

The *Times* and *Herald Tribune* of 1953 compared with those of 1933.

"Of Yesteryear—IV," Nov. 28, 1953, pp. 83-99.

The *Daily News* and *Mirror* of 1953 compared with those of 1933.

"The Tonsorial Election," Nov. 20, 1954, pp. 168-78.

The New York papers' reactions to the congressional elections of 1954 interpreting the results as a Republican "victory" though the party lost control of the Congress and some governorships.

"W. R., Jr., in the U.S.S.R.," Feb. 27, 1955, pp. 64-75.

The twists and turns of the Hearst "party-line" on Russia, inspired by the reports on a trip to Russia by William Randolph Hearst, Jr.

"New York Revisited," Oct. 29, 1955, pp. 106-16.

Liebling returns to New York after months in Europe and joyfully renews his acquaintance with the New York papers.

"Eden Must Go—Or Must He?" Nov. 24, 1956, pp. 125-32.

The wrangling in the London press over whether the ceasefire in the Suez War indicated defeat or victory for Prime Minister Eden.

"Do You Belong in Journalism?" May 14, 1960, pp. 105-12.

Monopoly trends in the American press. Liebling recalls recent deaths of newspapers and tells why the lessening of competition is bad.

"The Coast Recedes," May 21, 1960, pp. 124-30.

How the New York papers reacted to the Z-2 spy plane incident.

"Inflamed But Cool," Aug. 20, 1960, pp. 86-98.

The handling of the union and management viewpoints by the *Times* and *Herald Tribune* in the Long Island Rail Road strike.

"The Big Decision," Oct. 29, 1960, pp. 146-50.

The quadrennial rite of the newspapers in waiting until late in the campaign before making their unsurprising presidential endorsements.

"When News Isn't," Nov. 5, 1960, pp. 182-6.

The almost unanimous silence of the New York newspapers about an approaching American Newspaper Guild strike deadline. Liebling mourns that television seems to be taking over the job of forming the public's impressions of presidential candidates.

"Potemkin Rides Again," April 29, 1961, pp. 121-5.

Gagarin's flight into space and some American writers' "sour grapes" attitude toward the Russians' achievement.

"A Look at the Record," Oct. 14, 1962, pp. 187-93.

Liebling is highly critical of W. A. Swanberg's biography *Citizen Hearst*. The Boston *Record-American* is an example of what Hearst newspapers are like.

"A Touch of Wall Street," Nov. 25, 1961, pp. 218-27.

Some kind words for the *Post*, but also misgivings that the *Post*'s outlook may be changing to reflect that of a more affluent society.

"Dressed in Dynamite," Jan. 12, 1963, pp. 91-9.

The wonders of crime reporting in the Las Vegas *Sun*.

"Offers and Demands," Jan. 26, 1963, pp. 110-20.

The issues and causes of the New York newspaper strike, and the New York *Standard*, a strike-spawned publication.

"Back," March 16, 1963, pp. 173-9.

The renewal of publication by the *Post*.

"Step by Step with Mr. Raskin," April 13, 1963, pp. 143-52.

High praise for A. H. Raskin of the *Times* for his epic account of the New York newspaper strike and for the *Times*, too.

### OTHER PRINCIPAL ARTICLES ON THE PRESS

"Publisher: The Boy in the Pistachio Shirt," *The New Yorker*, Aug. 2, 1941, pp. 21-28.

"Publisher: The Pax Howardiensis," *The New Yorker*, Aug. 9, 1941, pp. 20-31.

"Publisher: An Impromptu Pulitzer," *The New Yorker*, Aug. 16, 1941, pp. 20-27.

"Publisher: Once Again She Lorst 'er Nime," *The New Yorker,* Aug. 23, 1941, pp. 23-33.

A four-part profile of Roy W. Howard, dwelling on Howard's flamboyant affectations and exploits and generally depicting him as a shallow person and journalist.

"A Free Press?" *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine,* Feb. 1947, pp. 13-15.

Liebling maintains that the press is free for those who can afford the huge financial investment and that the profit motive shapes the press in America.

"No Retrogression," *The New Yorker,* Aug. 21, 1948, pp. 71-4.

A review of Greene's *Star Reporters and 34 of Their Stories* and Andrews' *Washington Witch Hunt.* Liebling comments on what good reporting should be.

"The Press," *Holiday,* 7:2 (Feb. 1950), pp. 98-101, 124-8.

As part of an issue on Washington, Liebling describes the Washington press corps, how it goes about gathering information and its virtues and failings.

"Second City: II—At Her Feet the Slain Deer," *The New Yorker,* Jan. 19, 1952, pp. 32-55.

Extensive comment on Col. Robert R. McCormick, publisher of the Chicago *Tribune,* and an outline of the newspaper situation in Chicago.

"Notes and Comment" (first item), *The New Yorker,* Sept. 20, 1958, p. 32.

Liebling pleads for an official time limit on recognition of fallen statesmen and governments.

"A View With Alarm," *The New Yorker,* Dec. 20, 1958, pp. 113-18.

A review of Joseph and Stewart Alsop's *The Reporter's Trade,* plus an appraisal of Joseph Alsop's journalism.

"Notes and Comment" (first item), *The New Yorker,* Jan. 24, 1959, p. 25.

Liebling describes how he learned from the newspapers of the recovery of a stolen baby—a penetrating insight into why Liebling and other people sometimes find the newspapers indispensable.

"Notes and Comment" (first item), *The New Yorker,* Jan. 16, 1960, pp. 23-4.

Liebling restates Albert Camus' proposal for the establishment of a critical newspaper to follow the regular newspapers.

"Notes and Comment" (first item), *The New Yorker,* Nov. 19, 1960, p. 41.

The constant drone of commercials during the Election Night television coverage prompts Liebling to complain that people should be able to see straight news "tribute-free" at least one night every four years.